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ABSTRACT

This article examines conditions favorable for advancing gender equity and proposes that now is the time to reactivate and energize equity strategies. It discusses six changing conditions that collectively offer an opportunity for advancing gender equity in hiring practices for school principals and superintendents: (1) school-site governance structures that emphasize local accountability for student achievement have changed the nature of who hires school leaders; (2) the increasing desire for essential leadership skills that promote collaboration, consensus building, and empowerment of others has resulted in more opportunities for women; (3) an increasing number of vacancies and a dwindling applicant pool for positions of principal and superintendent have created high-demand conditions for qualified aspirants, affording women candidates more opportunities; (4) antidiscrimination legislation has fostered a more open environment for hiring women in nontraditional roles and has led more women to enter higher education; (5) women have made up at least half of educational administration program enrollments since the mid-1980s, thus increasing their numbers in the hiring pool; and (6) an increase in the percentage of women in the educational administration professorate means that more role models and support will be available to women. (Contains 50 references.) (RJM)

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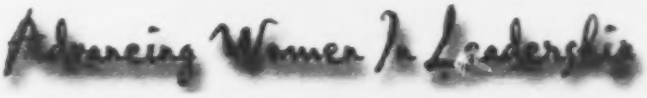

School Leadership Of The 90's And Beyond: A Window Of Opportunity For Women Educators

Joyce P. Logan, Ed.

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In the midst of thes school evolution, vacancies for principal and superintendent positions are increasing at a
time when more women than men are enrolled in preparation programs for educational administration.

Changes taking place in today's schools open a window of opportunity for more women to move into educational administration. Education reform brings a new governance structure, modifies leadership practices, and emphasizes accountability for results. In the midst of this school evolution, vacancies for principal and superintendent positions are increasing at a time when more women than men are enrolled in preparation programs for educational administration. This article examines conditions favorable for advancing gender equity and proposes that now is the time to reactivate and energize equity strategies.

Changes and Challenges

A number of conditions that currently exist affect educational administration and have potential for redirecting hiring practices for these positions. A convergence of school reform, supply and demand for administrators, and societal changes enhances opportunities for more women to become school administrators. Six specific circumstances are addressed in this discussion:

1. School-site governance structures emphasize local accountability for student achievement (Hallinger, 1992; Harvey, 1991; Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1994).

2. Essential leadership skills in restructured schools promote collaboration, consensus building, and empowerment of others (Common & Grimmit, 1992; Cuban, 1988; Leithwood, 1995; Murphy, 1995).

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3. Nationally, an increasing number of vacancies and a dwindling applicant pool for positions of principal and superintendent create high-demand conditions for qualified aspirants for these positions (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], 1988; Brockett, 1996; Klauke, 1990).

4. Antidiscrimination legislation has fostered a more open environment for hiring women in nontraditional roles (Flansburg & Hanson, 1993; Gupton & Del Rosario, 1997; National Women's Law Center, 1997).

5. Women have made up at least half of educational administration program enrollments since the mid-80s (Bell & Chase, 1993; Logan, 1998; National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 1998; Tingley, 1996).

6. An increase in the percentage of women in the educational administration professorate (McCarthy & Kuh, 1997), as well as mentoring programs for women administrators, provide role models that validate school and school system administration as a career choice for women (Wesson, 1997).

These six changing conditions that collectively offer an opportunity for advancing gender equity in hiring practices for school principals and superintendents are discussed in succeeding paragraphs. Women have been historically underrepresented in these two top-level school positions in contrast to the number of women teachers (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Tyack & Hansot, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989).

School-site Governance and Accountability

School governance reforms such as school-based decision making (SBDM) and teacher empowerment change the rules for who makes hiring decisions. In Kentucky, for example, school council members make the final selection for employment of principals (Kentucky Acts, 1990). In addition, principals must consult their school council when staffing other positions. Although officially school boards hire all employees, selection for employment of school-based personnel now resides at the school level. Thus, school boards are no longer the predominant gatekeepers for the principalships. School councils share in these decisions.

Although national figures on gender composition of school councils are not yet readily available, research in Kentucky and Kansas show that women in these states represent the majority of school council membership (Kentucky Department of Education, 1996) and that more women than men participate in council meetings (Furtwengler, Furtwengler, Holcomb, Hurst, & Owens, 1995). It should also be noted that women constitute a majority of teachers in the nation's schools, therefore, teacher empowerment (as well as council membership) gives women a strong voice in school decisions. This change does not presuppose that women will hire women. It does, however, lead to a speculation that school reform has shuffled the players who influence hiring decisions.

School boards still select superintendents. School council influence for this position will be longer in coming. Studies have shown that career patterns that lead to the superintendency generally come via the principalship route and that the most likely route is the high school principalship (Shakeshaft, 1989). It follows, therefore, that changes in who occupies principalship positions will in the long run have an effect on staffing the superintendency. School-based governance and the changing leadership paradigm affect the role of both superintendent and principal and, therefore, call for a new look at the knowledge and

skills required for these roles.

Accountability places more emphasis on the job to be done than who does the job. Student achievement is paramount to school success; therefore, the school councils and school personnel must focus on teaching and learning that fosters high achievement by all students (Capper, 1993). Legislative and community pressures demand quantitative evidence of gains in student achievement. States such as Kentucky link rewards and sanctions for schools to student results. High stakes accountability for student achievement shifts attention to the job to be done rather than who does the job--another factor that can contribute to open access for women or men administrators who demonstrate requisite characteristics to get the job done.

Essential Leadership Skills

The traditional bureaucratic model of schools was led by administrators who governed teachers, students and staff through formalized goals and procedures (Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1996). In top-down hierarchical organizations, authoritarian leadership was most often the pattern for school administration. Public perception tended to favor men as better able than women to handle discipline, particularly at the secondary level. Men were also viewed as more suited than women for working with predominantly male boards of education and dealing with political influences of the superintendency. Culturally defined, desirable feminine behavior was nurturing and caring for others; placing importance on relationships and the quality of life; and using interpersonal skills, consensus, and negotiation for solving problems (Bass, 1981; Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970; Hofstede, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Organizational leadership of the 90s requires facilitative leadership that empowers others and values diverse discourse as a means of reaching better decisions (Grogan, 1998). School principal and superintendent roles are being reconceived, renegotiated, and reshaped (Bredesen, 1998; Brunner, 1998; Grogan, 1998). Brunner (1998) notes that literature on women in positions of power supports the notion that women bring to administrative practice many characteristics necessary for school reform. With a redefinition of requisite skills and characteristics of an effective school administrator, a teachable moment exists for erasing gender stereotypes and focusing on desirable characteristics that applicants (men or women) bring to the position. The dissonance created by changing perceptions about schools presents an opportunity for educating school council and school board members to identify the best candidates to fill school administrative positions based on strengths and skills that are not gender specific.

Principalship and Superintendency Demand and Supply

Both principalships and superintendencies are experiencing high rates of turnover and a shrinking applicant pool (NASSP, 1998; Tingley, 1996). Turnover rates for school administration have more than doubled in recent years (NASSP, 1998). More than half of all superintendents and principals are becoming eligible for retirement (Bowles, 1990; Hess, 1988). The demand for school administrators is likely to become even greater with a predicted 10 to 20% increase in the need for school administrators through 2005 due to increased enrollments (NASSP, 1998).

A report by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (cited in Tingley, 1996) called attention to a growing concern about the size and quality of the candidate pool for administrative conditions. Educational reform narrowed the gap between teacher salaries and those of administrators and, at the same time, increased the complexity of school leadership line positions. Educational reform initiatives since the 80s have significantly affected the superintendency (Bredeson, 1998). Changes in

traditional sources of power for the position and priorities for the work role have placed superintendents in the position of legitimating their influence with constituents and competing with other local officials for scarce resources (Bredeson, 1998). The stress and uncertainties of the superintendency are likely factors in a high rate of turnover for the position (Gmelch, 1990; Sweeney, 1982). Brockett (1996) expressed a nationwide concern that superintendency positions in the next decade will become vacant faster than they can be filled.

The NASSP (1998) in a national survey of 403 superintendents asked about principalship shortages and found that 55% of the respondents reported a shortage in the labor pool for secondary principal positions. Insufficient compensation compared to responsibilities, job stress, and time requirements are cited by educational leaders and personnel officers as deterrents to the attractiveness of this position.

What does this shortage of principal and superintendent applicants mean for women administrative aspirants? Search committees, school boards, and councils will be hard pressed to find sufficient qualified applicants. Opportunities exist for well qualified applicants. The job openings are there.

Legislative and Cultural Change

Title IX and supporting legislation such as the Women's Educational Equity Act opened doors for women in education and extended employment protections of the Civil Rights Act to include gender (Flansburg & Hanson, 1997). Changes brought about by legislation show up directly in visible processes and procedures. Attitudes toward these changes and acceptance of different ways of thinking take much longer but must occur before culture and societal expectations are modified. In spite of its limitations, Title IX has made significant change in U.S. education and within society (Flansburg & Hanson, 1997).

More women moving into higher education and filling nontraditional occupational roles as a result of antidiscrimination legislation, a national focus on inequities, and more successful women visible in a variety of roles have influenced societal expectations and helped to create a more favorable environment for women in administrative leadership. Women have moved into more executive jobs in the corporate world. An annual census of women corporate officers by the research group Catalyst showed that women hold 10.6% of corporate officer posts in the Fortune 500 companies (cited in Jackson, 1997). The study noted that work is still needed to help women advance in business but that the number of women among the top five earners at Fortune 500 companies has more than doubled since 1994. Times have changed dramatically in the last 20 years, and women leaders have been evident in every walk of life for sometime (West, 1997). Possibilities for women to move into top-level school administrative positions are more optimistic than ever before. Today's world is rapidly changing and change has become a way of life. Although problems still persist and much remains to be done to remove gender filters in the workplace, conditions are favorable for advancing gender equity.

Women's Leap into the Hiring Pool

In school administration programs, the percentage of women students now outnumbers men. A 1997 survey of member institutions in the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) showed that 74% of certification programs in respondent institutions had from 51% to 72% women (Logan, 1998). Thirty percent of these institutions had more than 60% women students in these programs. The survey response rate was 50%. Results from this survey correspond to other research that shows women entering educational administration programs in increasing numbers since the 1970s (Cunanan, 1994; Grogan, 1996; Edson, 1988). Bell and Chase (1993) reported that women have made up at least half of educational administration program enrollments since the mid-80s. The number of women awarded

superintendent certificates increased nationally between 1970 and 1984 by 15% (Grogan, 1996)

Women enrolled in doctoral educational administration programs reflect only a slightly lower percentage than certification enrollments. The UCEA survey showed 59% of respondents with a majority of women doctoral students (Logan, 1998). Of those with less than 51% women in educational administration doctoral programs, 30% had between 41% to 50% women. The percentage of women completing these doctoral programs experienced the greatest gain after 1980. Thirty-seven percent of reporting UCEA institutions had 41% to 50% women doctoral completers since 1980, 30% had between 51% and 60%, and one institution reported over 51% women doctoral completers after 1980. Other research has shown that women often believe that in order to be hired for administrative positions they must be better prepared than men (Gupton & Slick, 1996); therefore, more women than men educational administrative aspirants may seek a doctorate degree.

The low percentage of women employed in school administration line positions cannot be attributed to a lack of aspiration to be principal or superintendent. With the number of women who have entered and completed educational administration programs since 1980, lack of aspiration is clearly not a barrier. More women than men are entering the applicant pool. Work remains to be done to gain attention for women and minorities as potential school leaders (Bowles, 1990).

Support Systems for Women

A noticeable increase in the percentage of women faculty members in university preparation programs has been an encouraging influence for women to become educational administrators. In 1986 only 12% of educational administration faculty were women compared to 27% women for college faculties overall (Bell & Chase, 1993; McCarthy & Kuh, 1997). By 1994, women in UCEA institutions made up 29% of all educational leadership faculty (McCarthy & Kuh, 1997). Women professors serve as role models for aspiring women administrators and help to validate students' decision to prepare for school administration.

Literature since 1980 has shifted emphasis from explanations for underrepresentation of women in educational administration to a need for better support systems (Benton, 1980; Coursen, 1989; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Johnson, 1991; Swiderski, 1988). This attention to mentoring, role models, and networks for women is one plausible explanation for the greater numbers of women preparing for these positions. Mentorships and responsible internship placements assist women's transition into school administration and continue to be important.

As more women become principals and superintendents, support strategies should be redirected toward helping those who enter the field succeed and advance. Career advancement and career mobility continue to be concerns (Grady & Gosmire, 1995; Irby & Brown, 1995).

Women need connectedness in the workplace (Gilligan, 1982). The Internet and e-mail add new media for networking and communicating (Glasscock, 1997). Communities of interest on the Internet enable worldwide communication in an instant. Electronic networks such as Advancing Women can be important tools to build a sense of community among women leaders. These electronic support systems help women connect with one another as they develop an identity as administrators (Glasscock, 1997).

Strategic Advancement Strategies

Now is the time for University educators to move away from SOS "save our ship" strategies that recruit

women and bolster educational administration enrollments. This article is not an SOS call but rather a SAS challenge--a challenge to educational administration faculty to develop and implement new strategic advancement strategies that level the playing field for women and men and that promote high expectations for all persons who enter the profession of school leadership. Today's schools can afford no less. As one of the prime gatekeepers of the field, faculties in educational administration preparation programs can be catalysts for change. Communities look to universities for leadership. Higher education reform expects universities to serve their constituencies through education and support of local leadership. Reforming and reframing schools presents an opportune time to set new goals for the profession and to activate strategies to get there. Equal access in hiring practices for qualified school administrator candidates can be advanced through information and training for school council and school board members; through a relevant, rigorous administrative preparation program appropriate for the context of today's schools; and through continuous efforts to focus public attention on respect for diversity and desirable leadership skills for schools.

Bateson (1996) emphasized that change represents an ongoing adjustment and adaptation to new contexts and is not something that will ever be done once and for all (p. 7). Equity and equality should be regarded in the same manner. Advancement in these areas requires continuous effort. New contexts require strategic action. Educational administration is at the apex of systemic school reform. The context of schools has changed significantly since 1990. If equity in employment, advancement, and retention of highly qualified school leadership is where we want to go, we must rethink and reactivate a plan to get there. Conditions are right to adapt, adjust, and advance the cause of equity and quality. Change is underway but we cannot rest. The job is not done.

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